

A
MEMORANDUM

TO
THE PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

FOR
The Creation Of An Autonomous State
COMPRISING
Karbi Anglong And North Cachar Hills

JOINTLY SUBMITTED BY
The Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC)
AND
The Karbi Students' Association (KSA)
H.Q - DIPHU : KARBI ANGLONG

This day the 18th May 1987

To

The Prime Minister of India
New Delhi—110 001

Sub :— MEMORANDUM for the creation of an Autonomous State comprising Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts of Assam.

Most Honourable Sir,

We bring to you the greetings of the people of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills. We, also, on behalf of the people, wish you good health and long life so that our Nation may continue to receive your invaluable services.

Creation of an Autonomous State comprising Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills Districts of Assam is a long standing demand of the tribals of the two hills districts. Different parties have from time to time submitted memoranda to your Office expressing the aspiration of the people equivocally. For a full decade the people have waited upon your Office to get their demand fulfilled. However, your Office had attended to some other problems of our Country which the people of the two hill districts of Assam have dutifully endorsed.

Consequent to recent socio-political developments in Assam and elsewhere in the Country the necessity of creating an Autonomous State for the two hills districts have become more pressing than ever before ; and now it has become unavoidable. During the last one year the people of the districts, under the leadership of the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) and the Karbi Students' Association (KSA), have raised their voices to the seriousness of their problems and to break the Government's apathy to their demand. In conjunction with the wishes of the people as expressed through the ASDC and the KSA, we, the undersigned, do submit a memorandum herewith for favour of your perusal and immediate creation of an Autonomous State in accordance with the provisions of Art. 244 (A) of the Constitution and as per plan proposed in Appendix-I of this Memorandum.

We thank you.

Yours faithfully,

(Borsing Rongphar)
General Secy.,

Karbi Students' Association,
Diphu : Karbi Anglong.

(Bharat Kr. Timung)
Convener,

Autonomous State Demand Committee
Diphu : Karbi Anglong

Date.....

Copy to :

MEMORANDUM

INTRODUCTION :

The two Hill districts of Assam, namely—Karbi Anglong district and N. C. Hills District—are the only remaining hill districts of Assam. The other hill districts were constituted into the present Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram. The two hills are geographically contiguous and some of its principal features are the following :

Location :

Between 24 degree 54 mins North and 26 degree 41 mins North Latitude and between 92 degree 8 mins East and 93 degree 53 mins East Longitude.

Total Area : 15,237 Sq. K.M.

Boundary :

The boundary of the proposed Autonomous State is as follows :—

- a) East : The State of Nagaland and Jorhat district of the state of Assam.
- b) West : The State of Meghalaya and Nowgong district of the state of Assam.
- c) North : Nowgong and partly of Jorhat districts of Assam.
- d) South : Cachar district of the state of Assam.

There are tribal areas contiguous to the districts. It can not be reasonably explained why those areas were not included in the districts at the time of their formation.

Topography :

1. The Mikir Hill at an average altitude of 740 Metres above sea level.
2. The Kopili, Jamuna and Dhansiri Valley at an average altitude of 200 Metres above sea level.
3. The North Cachar Hills at an average altitude of 1050 Metres above sea level.

The beautiful blend of hills and plain make the districts ideal for all sorts of agricultural activities. The districts also have a number of swift running rivers ideal for tapping hydro-electricity.

People :

58% of the total population of the two districts are tribals of the Indo-Mongoloid race. When the districts were created the tribal percentage was much higher (see Appendix-III). The major tribes are the Karbis, the Dimasas, the KUKI-CHIN tribes, the Naga tribes, the Lalungs, the Bodos and the Jaintias in the descending order of numbers.

History :

The present Karbi Anglong district, from time immemorial, was ruled by Karbi Chiefs ; and the North Cachar Hills and the adjoining areas were ruled by the Kacharee Kings. They were sovereign and had mixed relations with surroundings. The Ahom Kings even sent gifts to Karbi Chief recognising his sovereignty. Only as late as 1838, the British tried to bring the hillmen into some kind of revenue settlement. North Cachar was annexed to British territory even later in 1854, after the death of King Tularam Senapati, and after the surviving members of his family were pensioned off.

Until then both the areas were sovereign and were never under the rulers of the Plain of Assam although they had political adjustments at different times. After the British took over, they recognised the political, ethnic, cultural and linguistic peculiarities of the region ; and they tried to find a suitable administrative system for the areas.

When the Simon Commission was appointed, the problems of the hill tribals were also looked into. The Commission recognised the area as a different political unit and recommended peculiar method of administration whereby any law passed by the State Legislative Council would not be applicable in the hill area unless approved by the Governor.

Even the Government of Assam had recommended that union of hills and plains was artificial resented by both the parties. The Legislative Council had resented the burden which the administration of the area placed on the Provincial revenues. The people of the plains feared that their own political growth were being thwarted by their being yoked with the backward tracks. During the initial British period, the prominent views of both official and non-official were against the inclusion of Mikir Hills, North Cachar Hills and other hill tribal areas within the Province of Assam.

The White Paper of 1933 :

The White Paper on Indian Constitutional Reforms accepted the Simon Commission recommendations and also the classification of the EXCLUDED and the PARTIALLY EXCLUDED areas. Mikir Hill fell within the Partially Excluded area where the Governor was the sole controller and administrator. The Legislature could have discretion on matters relating to the area only with the prior permission of the Governor. Even the Ministers had no Constitutional right to advise the Governor on matters relating to the area.

The Joint Select Committee :

The Joint Select Committee generally supported the White Paper. The major witnesses in the Joint Select Committee contended that the hill areas should be totally excluded from the Provincial administration for reasons like—

1. The tribals were too few numerically and hence they would be politically and culturally dominated by the plain people.
2. The interests of the tribals were different and hence, their interests would be sacrificed for the interests of the plain people.

3. The hillmen would be economically exploited by the people of the plain who were more numerous and more advanced.
4. The tribal administration of justice was peculiar and at times antagonistic to that of the plain areas ; and many more such reasons.

The Joint Select Committee recommended the exclusion of the backward hill areas from the controls of the Provincial Legislature. The Joint Select Committee recommended that the areas to be Excluded and Partially Excluded should be determined by an Order-in-Council. This recommendation was examined by the Union Legislature and the officials of the Provincial Government and almost unanimously decided that Mikir hill and N. C. hill should be put under the Excluded area in view of the adverse under-developed nature of their people. However, in contradiction to the recommendations of its Deputy Commissioners, the Provincial Government of Assam argued that Mikir hill tract should be under the Partially Excluded because the hill was not in the frontiers and also the area was close enough for the government officials to check any possible exploitation against its people.

By categorising the hill areas not much progress could be brought in the lives of the tribals. Among the Partially Excluded areas Mikir hill tract continued to be the most backward—even more backward than the Excluded areas of the Mizo and the Naga Hills. Moreover, Mikir hill tract suffered the most as it was looked after in parts by Nowgong, Sibsagar and Jowai thus influences of different kinds were imposed on the inhabitants of the tract.

Before Independence was granted to India there was much speculations about the fate of the tribals. The Cabinet Mission suggested that there should be an Advisory Committee to study and make recommendations about the administration of the tribal areas and accordingly the Constituent Assembly set up an advisory Committee known as the North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Committee with Gopinath Bordoloi as Chairman. The Committee co-opted Semson Sing Ingty and Khorsing Terang as members from the Mikir hill tract, and the Tribal Council submitted a memorandum to the Committee for North Cachar hill.

The Bordoloi Committee :

The Bordoloi Committee recommended that the tribals should be allowed to evolve from their tribal institutions and at the same time their contact with the civilised world should be maintained so as to make them aware of the progress of the outside world. The Committee also recommended that the tribals should be vested with powers on land; forest, agriculture, local laws and village and town managements.

As a result of the Bordoloi Committee recommendations and the memorandum submitted by the concerning tribals, Mikir hill tract and N. C. hill were constituted into the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills District arming it with the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and put under the administration of the State of Assam along with the other tribal areas, viz—Khasi Hills, Garo Hills, Lushai Hills and Naga Hills. Later N. C. Hill was granted districthood and in 1976, Mikir Hill District was renamed Karbi Anglong District. Hence Karbi Anglong (Mikir Hill tract area) and North Cachar Hill area were inducted into Assam and India by the British.

It is therefore clear that Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hills districts are the exclusive domains of the tribals and this fact has been given mandatory sanctions by awarding them with the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Under para 3 of the Sixth Schedule the tribals are given the exclusive right to determine "the allotment, occupation or use or the setting apart of land" within the tribal areas as specified in the Table appended to Para 20 of the Sixth Schedule. Karbi Anglong and N. C. Hills Districts are specified as Part-I in the Table. The two districts have, therefore, been granted autonomous powers with the sole purpose of protecting the interests, the rights and the privileges of the tribals and also implicitly recognising the historical right of the tribals for self-government. Hence, under no circumstances the interests of the tribals within the specified areas should be endangered.

But putting the tribal areas under the patronage of the State of Assam has turned out to be a costly historical blunder. As already noted, various committees looking into the affairs of the tribals and the responsible officials of the erstwhile Provincial Government of Assam had uniformly expressed the view that the union of hills and plains would have adverse consequences; and the Bordoloi Committee had thought it otherwise and had put the tribal areas within the State of Assam. But whatever have happened to the tribals since then are described very briefly in the following with special reference to the tribals of Karbi Anglong and N. C. Hills districts :

1. The relations between the people of the Assam plain and the hill-men have always been one of obligatory convenience. Politically, culturally and also economically the thickly populated and more advanced plain of Assam have always dominated the ignorant, poverty-stricken and very thinly populated Assam hills. The people of the Assam plain have always felt and acted superior to the hillmen and the hillmen having been looked down upon are obliged to feel neglected, distant and inferior. This 'complex' being the traditional trait of the larger Indian communities, their attitudes towards the Indo-Mongoloid tribes of the North-East can not be reformed unless the tribals are allowed to develop and nurture their genius in their own way and win the respect of the larger Indian communities. The pre-conceived notion that the tribals need to be looked after, spoonfed and their traditions and cultures assimilated to the traditions and cultures of the majority Indian or the so called 'National Mainstream' is a grave national blunder which only kills the drives and initiatives of the tribals. The traditions and cultures of the Indo-Mongoloid tribes are Indian enough and they must be allowed to develop unhindered. This is the cry of the tribals of Karbi Ang' ng and N. C. Hills today. For obvious reasons, their aspirations can be fulfilled only by granting self-government to them.

2. The suppressive language policy of the successive governments of Assam is another domination the hillmen have been subjected to time and again. The attempt to make Assamese as the State Official Language and to impose the language on the tribals was made in 1962 and upon receiving unfavourable reactions from the non-Assamese communities of the State, the Government had settled for a three language formula viz. Assamese in the Brahmaputra plain, English in the hill areas and Bengali in the Barak Valley. However, the hillmen began to doubt the prospects of their unique linguistic, traditional and cultural heritage and the demand for the creation of Hill State was intensified which led to the Assam Re-Organisation Act, 1969 and the North-Eastern Area Re-Organisation Act, 1971. At the time of the re-organisation, the government of Assam managed to convince the most backward tribes of all—the tribes of Mikir Hills and the North Cachar Hills districts—about the wisdom and permanenco of the three language formula and they opted out of Meghalaya. Betraying its earlier

stand, the Government of Assam made another Assamisation attempt in 1973 but after receiving unfavourable reaction again, the program was postponed for ten years hoping that the non-Assamese would have changed their opinion by then. Nevertheless, the government created an educational policies pertaining to the establishment, recognition and government responsibilities of educational institutions by which schools in the economically backward hill areas would not thrive thereby making students' exodus into the Assamese medium schools in the Assam plains imperative. On the completion of ten years, the Assam government made another abortive attempt to assamise the hills.

The new generation of the Assamese politics have also upheld the policy of assamisation and the AGP Government just after ascending to power had made a similar attempt and the non-Assamese had to make hoo and cry again. The hillmen are, therefore, convinced that their unique language and their traditions as tribals have no prospect whatsoever in Assam.

3. The hill areas have been turned into a sanctuary for the overflow of job-seekers, contractors and other businessmen of the Assam plain. Assam is burdened with population explosion and almost vertical escalation of unemployment problem with the boom of University degree holders. As the appointment authority and the contract allotment authority are with the bureaucrats who are almost all from the larger communities of the Assam plains and they are under the control of the Assam Government, obviously, candidates from the plain areas of Assam are given preferential treatment in the appointment of jobs and in the allotment of works. Not to say of the plain areas of Assam, even in the hill, the hillmen are discriminated upon on such matters. Over 90% of all government and semi-government employees and about 95% of all contractors and businessmen in the hill are from the plain of Assam. As a result the little educated hillmen and the few business conscious hillmen remain jobless. It is an eye opener to all that the government of Assam had made a statement during the Budget Session of the Assembly in March, 1986 to the effect that not a single tribal from the hill areas was employed in the Assam State Secretariat. Hence the prospect of the hillmen with regards to employment and business opportunities within the State of Assam is woefully dim.

4. The God-gifted natural resources of Karbi Anglong and N. C. Hills have been incessantly and indiscriminately exploited which have brought untold miseries to the hillmen. Exploitations of bamboos, timbers, coal, limestone etc. coupled with unplanned and anti-native oriented tea industry have deprived many tribal families of their livelihood and have brought about a new dimension of influx disturbing demographic balance in the hill. Against the interests of the native tribals and without economic benefit of any form to the native, their natural resources are being drained out day after day. Unless self-government is granted immediately and the controlling authority of all natural resources is restored to the hillmen, very soon they will be left high and dry.

5. Notwithstanding Para 3 of the Sixth Schedule granting Autonomous powers to the District Council with regards to the "allotment, occupation or use or the setting apart of land", by the same Para, the State Government is given absolute power in the use and control of land which is a reserve forest. It also provides that the power granted to the District Council shall not prevent the compulsory acquisition of "any land, whether occupied or unoccupied, for public purposes by the Government of the State". Acting on this provision, the government of Assam is expanding reserve forest

areas in the name of plantation, capitalising on the hillmen's practice of jhum cultivation. This expansionist policy of the state of Assam is bound to retrieve all powers of land controls from the District Council which means lessening of the autonomy of the hillmen. Therefore, the Government of India should, of necessity, intervene to restore the autonomy of the hillmen by granting the right to self-government.

6. The provisions of Para 6 of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution are not only inadequate but also not conducive for the all-round development of the hill areas. Whereas the Constitution provides that the Governor may entrust certain executive functions to the District Councils on the subjects specified in Para 6(2) of the Sixth Schedule or on any other matter of the State; and whereas during the Assam re-organisation of 1969 the Government of Assam had dissuaded the leaders of Karbi Anglong and N. C. Hills from joining the State of Meghalaya on the unwritten understanding that the tribals of the two hills would be awarded with the greatest autonomy possible within a State by transferring certain subjects of the State to the District Councils, the Government's implementation of the understanding have fallen far short of the expectations of the hill people. As a demonstration of the attempt to fulfil its unwritten commitment the Government of Assam had by its Office Memo No. HAD.218/77/155 dated 14th November, 1979 merely entrusted certain administrative functions of atleast 16 (sixteen) departments to the District Councils with certain conditions attached, consequent to the revival of the movement for separate statehood (Please See Appendix-VII). While appearing to be granting autonomy to the hill people the government of Assam has tacitly retained control of the departments by enumerating conditions to the entrustment of the departments. This arrangement has only created more complexities in the administrations of the departments.

Again, Article 275 of the Indian Constitution provides the Central Government to sanction annual grants-in-aid for the areas created by the provisions of Article 244 of the Constitution to cover various schemes of development in the areas. Under the present arrangement, the Government of Assam receives the Central grants-in-aid on behalf of the District Councils, plans the schemes of development for the hill areas and lets its officers to implement the schemes on behalf of the District Councils, thus reducing the Councils into dignified cashiers. The plight of the District Councils with regards to the planning and budgetary exercises is reflected in the budget-discussions of the Karbi Anglong District Council for 1987-88 when an honorable member of the Council remarked that discussion on the budget was useless as the Council could not do anything to change it and the State had not honoured the opinion of the Council; nor had the Government sought the advice of the Councils on this matter. Usually, the State Government takes along time to channel the funds to the District Councils depending on the political mood of the Councils vis-a-vis the State Government's politics. This results in the excessive control of the State Government over the District Councils on all aspects of the administrations which only creates unwanted hurdles in the process of development. Since, the Government of Assam actually does not pay anything for the development of the hills, but the Assamese community benefits in the process at the expense of the native people instead, the people of the two hills must be allowed to determine and control their own destiny.

CONCLUSION :

Taking everything, said and unsaid, into consideration, the people of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills have judiciously concluded that the concept of equality, fraternity and freedom is a convenient myth being used only to play upon tribal innocence. Facts

speak louder than mere words and there is no doubt whatsoever that the illiterate and poverty-stricken tribes of the two hill districts have been taken advantage of, their wealth and resources plundered, their legitimate rights subtly curbed and their language and culture suppressed.

Our fellow tribes in the other hills, too, were subjected to the same kind of, unfortunate treatments, and they found emancipation on the creations of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram. It is rather too unfortunate for the freedom of India that this misfortune is still being perpetuated upon the defenceless tribes of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills while the Government pretends not to hear the echo of their cries.

We recall the kind of half-hearted arrangement made for the people of these districts during the North Eastern Area (Re-Organisation) Act, 1971 which only gave them more burden without powers. Only political arrangement the kind of which they are demanding can bring smiles to their agonised faces without grievously hurting the sentiments of the people of Assam.

Sir, we are aware of your heavy pre-occupations, but it is in your hands to give us political emancipation. Therefore, we the undersigned, on behalf of the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) and the Karbi Students' Association (KSA), are obliged to implore upon your government to create an Autonomous State for Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills of Assam in accordance with the provisions of Article 244(A) of the Constitution, in upholding the freedom and unity of our Country and our cherished democratic traditions. During the last decade the people of these hills have made several representations to your Office seeking the right to self-government and have waited upon the government patiently and obediently. But now upon receiving no response from your Office and in the face of menacing onslaughts, the patience of the people is wearing out and desperation is fast creeping in. We, therefore, implore upon you to take serious note of the urgency of the matter and take courageous and prudent steps towards meeting this legitimate demand of the people without delay, for delay would only worsen desperation in their minds which could then drive them hard to lose faith in democratic traditions.

We thank you.

Yours faithfully,

(BIBISON INGTI)
President.

scf A
(BABU RONGPI)
Convener.

(BORSING RONGPHAR)
General Secretary.

scf
(ELWIN TERON)
Spokesman.

On behalf of
Karbi Students' Association
DIPHU : KARBI ANGLONG :

scf
(Dr. JAYANTA RONGPI)
Spokesman.

On behalf of
Autonomous State Demand Committee.
DIPHU : KARBI ANGLONG :

Dated The.....

Memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India by Action Committee, Mikir and North Cachar Hills Leaders' Conference, demanding a separate state comprising the Mikir Hills and the N.C. Hills Districts and the contiguous tribal areas in Assam:

(The memorandum received approval of the meeting of the Action Committee held in 1/6/73 at Itanagar)

- * The Assamese people made no secret of their determination to ASSAMISE the linguistic minorities by wiping out their district language, culture, tradition and ways of life.
- * The leaders of the two hill districts formally organised themselves into the "Mikir and North Cachar Hills Leaders' Conference" and decided to demand creation of a separate state.